

THE DOVE'S RETURN TO THE ARK

NO. 637

A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 2, 1865,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth. Then he put forth his hand and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.”
Genesis 8:9.

THE sending forth of the raven and of the dove, have furnished ready materials for numerous allegories with which divines in different ages have sometimes edified, and more frequently amused their hearers. We cannot afford time to mention many of them, but one of the host may serve as a specimen. Certain expositors have fancied that the mission of the raven prefigured the sending forth of the law, which was black and terrible, and which came not back to man bearing any token of comfort, or sign of hope; and that afterwards the Lord sent forth the gospel, foreshadowed by the dove, which by-and-by came back to sinful man, bearing the olive branch of peace. Thus, they illustrated the great truth of God that there is no peace in the terms of the law, for that raven can only croak hoarsely and fiercely, but there is peace in the ground of the gospel, for the dove bears the olive branch in her mouth. Such far-fetched allegories as these, at the time when they were contrived and carried out, may have had their value, and have been instructive to an undiscerning age; it is not, however, to be regretted that the Church of today has far less taste for such childish things. We are quite as willing as any men to see allegories where they are really clear, for we remember the words of Paul concerning Hagar and Sarah, “which things are an allegory,” but we are not ready to follow the quaint and strange inventions of spiritualists whether ancient or modern. The clue must be evident, or we had rather not enter the labyrinth.

There is one adaptation of the incident before us which seems so naturally to suggest itself, that I cannot help using it this morning. The dove may well picture the believer's soul. That soul sometimes flies abroad to and fro, and takes a survey of all things—but it finds no rest for the soles of its foot anywhere except in Christ Jesus; and, therefore, however long in flight, it is sure eventually to return to its own proper resting place. The child of God can never be content out of his God—he who has once had Christ in him, the hope of glory, can never be satisfied to rest or glory except in the Lord Jesus.

Let us, this morning, carry out that one thought, and look at it in the various lights which this picture of the dove may throw upon it.

I. First, LET US LOOK AT THE DOVE SETTING OUT UPON HER VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY. She has been perfectly safe in the ark. Other fowls have perished—cattle and creeping things have all been destroyed by the flood—but this dove, with other favored ones, has been happily secured. She has wanted for nothing—for the God who put her into the ark has taken care of her there, and that righteous man who was made the means of her rescue has constantly provided her with her daily food. She has nestled in the ark and been happy and comfortable there, and yet she is about to stretch her wings and fly away from the boat of safety. Why does she act thus? Well may we ask this question of ourselves—we have been saved in Christ Jesus, many of us—saved when the floods of sin covered the rest of our kinsfolk; saved when our doubts and fears threatened eternal ruin to us. We have been provided for in Christ Jesus, and housed in His salvation. He has been no wilderness to us; we have found enduring rest, and seasonable provision in Him. How is it, then, that we can stretch our wings to fly, or even open our eyes to look abroad? My soul, is there not enough in Christ? Why will you seek elsewhere? Why leave the fountain for the broken cisterns? Will a man leave the fertile fields for a barren rock, or forsake the running waters for pestilential pools? Remember the mischief that Dinah gained unto herself when she left her father's house to go to the tents of Shechem. Think how the prodigal fared when he left his father's house. Why do you not tarry at home with your Husband and liege Lord? Why do you go abroad where all is empty and void and waste? Yet we must all confess that these hearts of ours are apt to bear us away from Christ, and these minds of ours are prone to forget Him, and to look abroad after some other love.

But why did the dove fly away? I answer first—a very simple answer to give, you will say—*because she had wings*. A creature with wings feels within itself a natural instinct to fly and, having been in the

ark so long where she had little space for flight, I daresay her liberty at first was very sweet to her. What are these pinions for—why are they covered with silver and the feathers with yellow gold, if I may not clip through yonder cloud and cleave these earth-mists and see what there is to be seen? And, therefore, because she has wings she flies; and so it is with us. Our soul has many thoughts and many powers which make the spirit restless. If we were without imagination, we might be content with the few plain truths which we have so well known and proved, but having an imagination, we are often dazzled by it, and we need to know whether certain things which look like solid truths really are. If we had no reason, but could abide entirely in a state of pure and simple faith, we might not be exposed to much of the restlessness which now afflicts us, but reason will draw conclusions, ask questions, suggest problems, raise inquiries, and vex us with difficulties. Therefore, because our souls are moved by so vast a variety of thoughts, and possess so many powers which are all restless and active, it is readily to be understood that while we are here in our imperfect state, our spirits should be tempted to excursions of research and voyages of discovery, as though we sought after some other object of love besides the One who still is dearer to us than all the world besides.

Possibly there was another reason. *This dove was once lodged in a dovecote.* When children, we saw men throwing up carrier pigeons into the air, laden with messages, and we foolishly wondered how the dove knew the way to go with the letter, dreaming as we did, that it flew with it wherever the person chose to direct the envelope. We soon learned the secret. The dove bears the letter to her own dovecote—she will go nowhere else with it—and it is not in the wit of man to make the dove fly in any other direction than towards its own home. The dove is thrown up into the air; she mounts aloft, whirls round and round and round, looking with eager eyes. At last, she sees the place where she has been known to rest, and where her little ones have been reared, and she darts straight to the spot. Before the ark was built, no doubt, this bird frequented much a chosen spot where it had built its nest and reared its young ones, and its heart went towards it. Though it had been in the ark so long, it had not forgotten the past; and therefore no sooner has it liberty than it seeks to fly in the direction of its own dovecote, although that cote had been swept away forever. Ah, and you and I, before we knew the Savior, we had a rest; before we had experienced the sweetness of His love, we found joy in sin. We built our nest, and we thought in our heart that we should never be moved. We were satisfied once after a fashion with the vanities of this present world; we had our loves, our joys, our pleasures, our delights; and that carnal old nature within us is not dead, and when it gets its liberty, it is sure to look out for its old haunts.

Have you not, even when singing God's praise, remembered a snatch of an old, perhaps lascivious song? Have not you frequently, when in the service of God, had brought to your recollection a dark scene of sin in which you had a share? And though you have loathed it with the *new* nature, yet has not the *old* nature tended towards it? And has not that base heart within—which will not die until flesh becomes worms' meat—whispered to you to go back to the fleshpots of Egypt, and once more to partake of the garlic, and leeks, and onions which were so sweet in the house of bondage? Yes, the dovecote still has its attraction. The best of men have still within them the seeds of those sins which make the worst of men so vile. The old serpent still creeps along the heart which has become a garden of the Lord. Our gold is mixed with dross. Our sky bears many a cloud, and the clearest river of humanity still has mud at the bottom. I marvel not that the dove flew away from the ark when she remembered her dovecote, and I do not wonder that, at seasons, the old remembrances get the upper hand with our spirit, and we forget the Lord we love, and have a hankering after sin.

Yet it would not be fair to forget that *this dove was sent out by Noah*—so that whatever may have been the particular motives which ruled the creature, there was a higher motive which ruled Noah who sent her out. Even so, there are times when the Lord permits His people to endure temptation. What does this passage mean concerning the Savior—"After He was baptized, He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil"? What? Led of the Spirit? Where will the Spirit lead Him? Will not the Spirit lead Him to His Father's temple that He may join in its hallowed exercises? Will He not lead Him to the mountain where He may proclaim glad tidings to the people? No. The Spirit led Him into the wilderness "to be tempted of the devil." We are taught to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." And very stupid people have tried to alter the petition into, "Leave us not in temptation." The Savior never said that. It would be a very proper prayer, but it is not what He said. His words are, "Lead us not into temptation." It appears, then, that sometimes God may allow His people to be led into temptation, or otherwise we need not say, "Lead us not into temptation." Such temptation produces excellent results, being overruled by divine grace for the lasting benefit of the Lord's people. The dove would love the ark far better than before, after taking its dreary flight above the watery waste. She would nestle more peaceful-

ly than ever in Noah's hands after having seen and known how impossible it was to find rest for the soles of her foot anywhere else. Thus the Lord permits His people to gad abroad in their thoughts, and to go flying about in their minds that their later repose may be sweeter and more enduring. He takes away from them the light of His countenance and familiar fellowship with Himself that the darkness may make them prize the sun. They fly from vanity to vanity, learning the emptiness of all, and then they cling to their own real bliss—their God and Father in Christ Jesus! And throughout life, they have to bless God for that dark and bitter experience which yielded so good and comfortable a fruit that it compelled them to know that there was none upon earth for them but Christ, and none even in heaven to fill their souls but their Lord Jesus. So when I see the Christian taking wing in his thought away from the ark, I will be grieved to see him in the temptation, but I will pray the Lord to overrule it that he may come back again and say, "Return unto your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you." Beloved, it is a bitter but a precious lesson to learn, that all is nothing out of Christ, and that Jesus alone can give us rest. May you all learn it thoroughly and learn it soon.

II. Now, MARK THE DOVE AS SHE FINDS NO REST.

She has plumed her wings, and she hurries in her search after a home. The mountain tops, I think, according to the preceding verses were just visible, but this was all. She flies over them and between them, as they rise like islands in the midst of that vast shoreless sea. At last, she tires—even the dove cannot fly forever. She needs to rest. Where shall she end her flight? The raven yonder is comfortable enough gorging himself upon the carcass of a huge beast which was floating by. The dove, however, cannot rest there—her nature loathes putridity, and she flies away from the reeking mass. Yonder is a tree—one of the mighty monarchs of the forest has been broken off in the great tempest which drowned the world, and is now floating high with branches lifted up like the masts of a vessel. She tries to light upon it, but it is covered with thick mire and filth. The wet and slime suit her not, and she takes to her wings again. Further off another object attracts her, and she speeds to it as well as her weary wings can carry her. But there is nothing there for her to rest upon. She turns east, north, south, but her wings grow weary for she can find no place where to rest the sole of her foot. As we observe her flapping her wings so languidly, I think we have a picture of a Christian in pursuit of an earthly object on which he would desire to set his heart. Forgetting that, here, we have no continuing city, the pilgrims of God at times wander in the wilderness hoping to find a settled habitation there; but their desolate hearts are soon faint within them, for there is no rest for their feet on earth.

The Savior very beautifully said, "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." What kind of rest did the Savior mean to give? I take it that He meant rest to all the powers of manhood. *The intellect* seeks after rest, and by nature seeks it apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Men of fine education, men of great mental powers are apt, even when converted, to look upon the simplicities of the cross of Christ—I may not say with disesteem—but still with an eye too little reverent and loving. They are snared in the net in which the Grecians were taken—they have a hankering to mix *philosophy* with revelation. The temptation is with a man of refined thought and high education to go away from the simple truth of Christ crucified, and to invent a more complicated, as the term is, a more *intellectual* doctrine. This it was which led the early Christian Church into Gnosticism, and bewitched them with all sorts of heresies. This is the root of Neology, and the other fine things which, in days gone by, were so fashionable in Germany, and are now so ensnaring to certain classes of divines. Brethren, I care not who you are, nor what your education may be—if you are the Lord's people, you will find no rest in the teachings of philosophy—or philosophizing divinity. You may receive this dogma of one great thinker, or that of another profound reasoner—but what the chaff is to the wheat—that will these be to the sure Word of God! All that reason, when best guided, can find out, is but the ABCs of the truth of God, and even that lacks sureness and certainty—while in Christ Jesus, there is treasured up all the fullness of wisdom and knowledge! All attempts on the part of Christians to be content with systems such as Unitarian and broad church thinkers would approve of must fail; true heirs of heaven must come back to the grandly simple reality which makes the plowboy's eyes flash with joy, and gladdens the pious man's heart—"Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Christ satisfies the most elevated intellect when He is believably received, but apart from Him, the mind of the regenerate discovers no rest.

The heart, too, needs satisfying. Every one of us needs an object to love. I suppose there can hardly live on earth a man so monstrously selfish that he can be perfectly wrapped up in himself, and care for no one. Some of the grossest villains, who have ever defiled the name of manhood, have had one point in which they could be touched; their hearts have gone out after one dear object—it may be a little child,

long dead—and yet the recollection of that little one sleeping beneath the turf has been a link to goodness. Many a hardened man has remembered his mother, and her name has touched his heart. We must love something, or someone. Man was not made to live alone, and therefore no man lives unto himself. Our heart must flow like a river, or it corrupts like a stagnant pool. Some have great hearts, and they require a great object on which to spend their love. They love fondly and firmly—too fondly and too firmly for earthly love. These are they who suffer from broken hearts. They have so much love that, when they set it upon an unworthy object, they reap a proportionate degree of misery and disappointment. Now, let me say solemnly, that no heart of a child of God will ever be satisfied with any object or person short of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is room for wife and children, there is room for friend and acquaintance, and all the more room in one's heart because Christ is there, but neither wife, nor children, nor friends, nor kinsfolk can ever fill the believer's heart. He must have Christ Jesus—there is no rest for him elsewhere. Do I address any believer who has been making an idol? Have you set up any god in your heart? Have you loved any creature so as to forget your Savior? Be it child, or husband, or friend, take heed of the sin of idolatry!

Ah, you cannot, you *shall* not find rest for the soles of your feet in the creature, however fair that creature may seem. God will break your idol before your eyes, or if He allows that idol to stand, it shall remain to plague and curse you, for thus says the Lord, “Cursed is he who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm.” “Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted?” Give your hearts to the Lord Jesus, and He will never disappoint you. Lean on Him with all your weight of affection, for He will never fail you. Come here, all you fond and doting, you lovers, and love with all the lavish wealth and fervent heat of your spirits; kindle your hearts until, like Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, they glow seven times hotter—here is a fuel with which you can maintain the flame forever! You whose love is like the sea, too deep to fathom, come to the Savior and give Him all, and He shall not waste a drop, for He deserves all you can give, and He will give you back a love which, compared with yours, shall be as the ocean when compared with the dewdrop that twinkles on the bough. So there *is* rest for the heart in Christ Jesus, but nowhere else.

Man has also *judgment*, and judgment, when exercised upon things right or wrong, is called *conscience*—and the conscience is a very difficult thing to quiet when once disturbed. Conscience is like a magnetic needle, which, if once turned aside from its pole, will never cease trembling; you can never make it still until it is permitted to return to its proper place—

*“In vain the trembling conscience seeks,
Some solid ground to rest upon.
With strong desire the spirit faints,
Till we apply to Christ alone.”*

We shall never be able to find lasting peace for conscience till we cast ourselves upon Christ Jesus! The child of God may sometimes so forget himself as to endeavor to base his hopes upon his experiences, his feelings, his joys, or his repentances. He may try to assure himself that all is well between God and his own soul because of his graces or his good works. Now, Christian, you know, or you ought to know by past experience, that you will never enjoy lasting peace here. You must come to Christ as you did at first, with nothing of your own, and take Him to be your all in all. And if you do not do this, your foot shall know no rest, for you shall fly wearily on till you shall drop with despair. Christ Jesus, in the preciousness of His besprinkled blood; Christ Jesus, in the glory of His snow-white righteousness; Christ Jesus, in the prevalence of His intercession; Christ Jesus, in the power of His arm, and the love of His heart, must be the sole and solitary dependence of every heir of heaven, and if you try to mix anything else with Christ, then your conscience shall accuse and Satan shall find an echo in your heart when he rails at you—and what will you do then? Let me say, dear friends, that for the entire man—we cannot stop this morning to take all the different powers with which man is endowed—but taking the whole together, there is nothing that can satisfy the entire man but the Lord's love and the Lord Himself. Many saints have tried to anchor in other shelters, but all have failed.

I believe Solomon was a saint, I know he was a sinner; I believe he was the biggest fool that ever lived, but I believe that he was also the wisest of men; he was, in fact, a mass of contradictions. Now, Solomon was permitted to make experiments for us all, and to do for us what we must not dare to do for ourselves. Here is his testimony in his own words—“I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What does it do? I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting my heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. I made me great works; I built houses; I planted vineyards—I made gar-

dens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water the wood that brings forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house. Also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I got men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had worked, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." "Vanity of vanity, all is vanity." What? The whole of it vanity? Is there nothing in all that wealth, Solomon? What? Nothing in that wide dominion of yours reaching from the river even to the sea? Nothing in Palmyra's glorious seat? Nothing in the house of the forest of Lebanon? Do you see nothing from Dan to Beersheba when you have made brass to be like pebbles, and gold and silver to be but as common dust of the land? In those sweet sounds that lull you to your rest, in all the music and dancing that delight you, is there nothing?

"Nothing," he says, "but weariness of spirit." This is his verdict when he has tried it all. To get hold of Christ, to have His love, and to taste of union with Him—this, dear brethren, this is everything! You need not try any other form of life in order to see whether it is better than the Christian's. Let me assure you, if you roam the world round, and search from Britain to Japan, you will see no sights like a sight of the Savior's face! And if you could have all the comforts of life, yet if you lost your Savior, you would be wretched; but if you get Him, then should you rot in a dungeon, you would find it a paradise! Should you live in obscurity, or die with famine, you would yet be satisfied with favor, and full of the goodness of the Lord!

III. Let us spend a moment in considering WHY THE DOVE COULD FIND NO REST FOR THE SOLE OF HER FOOT.

Was there a lack of *will* in the dove? Was she one of those discontented birds that will not rest anywhere? Nothing of the kind; she seems to have searched after rest, for otherwise it need not be recorded that she found none. There are certain people in this world who never will rest, and they certainly do not deserve it. They always grumble. No matter what you do, or what you do not do, they grumble. They grumble at the sun, and call him, as Thompson once did, "a rosy drunkard." They murmur at the moon, her light is too pale, and sickly, and variable; they murmur at death—it is a dreadful thing to lose one's friends; they murmur at life—everybody seems to die and be happy, they say, except themselves—they are condemned to live on. You can never please them; all things are either too hot or too cold, too young or too old, too rough or too smooth, too high or too low. They have made up their minds that there is nothing on earth that will ever satisfy them; they have set up an ultra standard of what they want, and the world does not yield it. No grass is green enough for them; no milk that is ever given by cows is fit for them to drink; no wine that was ever pressed from grapes is rich enough for their taste. Upon all created things, they use the only organ which seems to be of use to them, that is, their nose—and that they turn up! Such people as these will tell you that there is nothing on earth—nothing on earth. They have indigestion, their liver is out of order—and consequently, there is nothing on earth—everything here below is mean and despicable.

Now, when people talk like that you just measure their talk by the men, and make small account of their utterances. These men are not talking from their judgment—they are merely talking under the influence of an absurd, half-mad feeling; but such is not the case with the Christian. I know a considerable number of Christians who are of a cheerful disposition, and who would even as worldlings have been satisfied with very little. They are a kind of men, (I trust you have some of them for your friends), who are not often put out; they, on the other hand, always look at the bright side of everything, and if there should be a something which is a little amiss, they take it as a variety, and only say, "Well, this is a change," and so they make pleasure where others would find pain. And yet these very people, when they are converted, will tell you that they are not satisfied out of Christ! Now their verdict is worth considering. The dove had a will to find rest for the sole of her foot, but she could not.

It is not from want of will that I am compelled to say I cannot find anything beneath these stars, nor within the compass of the skies, that can satisfy my soul's desires. I must get my God and have Him to fill my large expectations, or I shall not be content. I mention these things because people are apt to suppose that Christians are all a set of melancholy hotheads, who put up with religion because there is nothing else that helps to make them to be so happily miserable, and therefore they take to it as congenial

with their melancholy disposition. But it is not so; we are a cheerful, genial race, and yet for all that, we are not resting the sole of our foot anywhere in earthly things.

Again, the reason why the dove could find no rest was not because she had no *eyes* to see. I know not how far a dove's eyes can discern, but it must be a very vast distance—perfectly incredible I would think. We see the dove sometimes mount aloft—we can see nothing, and yet she perceives her dovecote, and darts towards it. Now, the Christian does not say there is no joy on earth for him except in his Lord, because he has no power to see things pleasing and delightful. If there is melody in music, the Christian knows it, likes it, rejoices in it. If there is sweetness, his palate is as good as another man's. If there is anything to be found in wealth, or what the world calls pleasure, he can see it all—he is not blind. I know many Christians who are as quick in apprehension, as refined in taste, and as ready to appreciate anything that is pleasurable as other men, and yet these are men who are not fanatics, are not shut up to a narrow range of things, but their vision can take in the whole circle of sublunary delights. These are men who have not only seen, but even tasted, yet bear their witness that, like the dove, they can find no rest for the sole of their foot.

Moreover, the reason why the dove found no rest was not because she had no *wings* to reach it. Her wings were strong and swift. She could fly as well as the raven—perhaps she could in the long run outstrip him. So the Christian has power to enter into the enjoyments of the world if he likes. It is not because his youth has departed, and he has become old and shriveled, and therefore the delights of the flesh have ceased to be temptations to him. No. Of course there are some in that condition, who when converted can almost be taunted by sinners with the remark that they have tried the world's pleasures, and when they could not enjoy them they then turned away from them; but some of us are young and strong and full of blood, and our bones are full of marrow, and if we willed it we could be ringleaders in all sorts of pleasure, and plunge head first into the stream of sensual delight. We lack not courage, and we lack not force, and yet for all this—we say it solemnly, and the God Who searches all hearts knows we only say what we feel forced to say—that we can find no rest for the sole of our foot in earthly pleasures. We have tried, we have wished to rest, we have even wanted to be satisfied with the world, but the void within can never be filled out of the mines of earth. We cannot—God has made it all empty to us.

Now, what was the reason then? It was not lack of will, it was not lack of sight, nor was it lack of wings—what was it? The reason lay in this—*she was a dove!* If she had been a raven, she would have found plenty of rest for the sole of her foot. It was her nature that made her restless, and the reason why the Christian cannot find satisfaction in worldly things is because there is a new nature within him that cannot rest. “Up! Up! Up!” cries the new heart, “What have you to do here?” “Come, strike your tents,” cries the new creature, “you have no continuing city here—how is it that you try to make one in this barren wilderness? Away with you! What are you doing?” If I could transform myself to an unregenerate man, the world might content me, but if I am regenerate, it matters not into what society I may be thrown, I never can, I never shall, I must not, I dare not hope for contentment—for to the regenerate, Christ alone is satisfaction—they cannot find it anywhere else.

You see, then, that this is a great test—this will try you, dear friends, and divide you. If any of you are saying, “Oh, I am satisfied enough, I do not want this Christ the man talks about—give me this, and give me that, and I shall be quite content.” I say, “Very likely; so was the raven content with carrion. But, and if you are a child of God, you may seek contentment elsewhere, but you shall be compelled, perhaps by sore and bitter trials, to turn away from all earthly things, and fly back again to your ark.”

IV. Being disappointed, WHAT DID THE DOVE THEN DO? When she found there was no contentment elsewhere, what then? She flew back to the ark. Josephus tells us that the dove came back to Noah with her wings and feet all wet and muddy. I think it is very likely, but I do not think it any the more likely because Josephus says so. Some of you have grown wet and muddy. You have been trying to find rest in the world, Christian, and you have got mired with it. Trying to rest those feet where they could not rest, you have collected filth. What then? Shall I advise you to bathe in the flood? Shall I advise you to cleanse those wings till they are bright as they once were? No, I do not; I cannot give you any such advice; I can only say to you, “Do what the dove did.” She mounted again; she caught sight of the ark, and knew the place of safety. I want you once again to get a sight of Christ. Peter had gone far away, as the dove had done—he had denied his Master with oaths and curses—and what brought him back? Why, it was the Lord getting a sight of Peter, and Peter getting a sight of the Lord. The Lord turned and looked upon Peter, and “He went out and wept bitterly.” Was it not all done as soon as the Lord's eyes and Peter's eyes came into contact? If you are enabled, by the Holy Spirit, to remember that

there was a Savior who loved you so that heaven could not hold Him, and that He had to come to earth, and enter into your degradation, and bear your sin, and suffer for your sake, you will be getting right at once, however far off you are. If you look to Jesus, there is life for you in a look at the crucified One.

Then the dove, after looking, was not content with that—she began to speed with all her might back to the ark. So, when you have a faint view of your Savior, and you are once more consciously saved, then fly back to Him. I do not read that the dove made a tour round about, or that she thought she would try something else, but no, she took just the straightest line she could, the nearest way between herself and her loved abode, and went right straight away to Noah. Fear may have made her wings heavy, but it did not stop them, and mire and mud may have made the journey more laborious, but it did not turn her aside! Come you mired ones! Come you fainting ones, doves as you are! Though you think yourself to be black as the raven with the mire of sin—back, back to the Savior! Every moment you wait does but increase your misery; your attempts to plume yourself, and make yourself fit for Him are all vanity. Come to Him just as you are! “Return you backsliding Israel.” He does not say, “Return you *repenting* Israel,” (there is such an invitation, doubtless), but, “You *backsliding* one, as a backslider with all your backslidings about you. Return, return, return!”

V. I want you now to turn your eyes for a moment to THE VERY BEAUTIFUL SCENE, so it seems to me to be, at the end of her return journey.

Noah has been looking out for his dove all day long. Here she comes! How heavily she flies! She will drop—she will never reach the ark. Here she comes and Noah is ready to receive her. She looks spotted with mire and dirt, but Noah waits for her. She has just strength to get on to the edge of the ark—she can hardly hold on there and is ready to drop, when Noah puts forth his hand and pulls her in unto him. Mark that—“pulled her in unto him.” It seems to me to imply that she did not fly right in herself, but was too fearful, or too weary to get right in. She got as far as she could, and then he put forth his hand and pulled her in unto him. Did you ever feel that blessed gracious pull, when your heart has been desiring to get near to Christ? Oh, it has been such tugging, such toiling in prayer—you could only say, “I would but cannot pray. My heart is heavy as lead and my soul as hard as adamant and dead as iron. I cannot stir myself and get near to the Savior. Oh that I could! Oh that I had the wings of a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest.” All of a sudden it comes, that gracious pull; your heart begins to be on fire; and before you are aware, your soul seems to be like the chariots of Aminadab. Now it is all well with you, now can you sing sweetly to your Beloved, who has done great things for you and you are glad. All this was you perceive to the wandering dove, to the miry dove speckled with filth; just as she was, she is pulled into the ark. So you, with all that sin of yours, and those wanderings will be received. “Only return”—those are two gracious words in the Bible—“Only return”—so it is put. What? Nothing else? No, only return. She had no olive branch in her mouth this time, nothing at all but just herself and her wanderings; but it is, “Only return,” and she does return, and Noah pulls her in. Lord, pull me in! My thirsty spirit faints to reach You! My soul cries out for Your presence, but cannot reach You! I see You, Lord! Pull me in! When like Esther I faint in Your presence, and cannot tell You what I would, stretch out Your silver scepter, read my heart and grant my desire, and show Yourself to me, and open my eyes to see You and know You.

Thus much concerning the dove and its likeness to our own hearts; now I close with these three things—

First, this becomes, first of all, *a test* to you. We can divide the house into two parts by asking the question, “Are you satisfied out of Christ?” Are you satisfied and content with anything short of a conscious knowledge of your union and interest in Christ Jesus? If so, you have no reason to believe that you are a converted man. If this world satisfies you, I have no fault to find, no reason to be angry with you. Who finds fault with horses for being satisfied with hay and oats? It is their natural food. Some persons are very indignant with others, because they will go to theatres and gay assemblies. They only take what their nature craves after. The raven is now feeding on his carrion. I draw a distinction forevermore between that which men without divine grace may do, and that which gracious men may do. The graceless man stands somewhat on the level of the beast that perishes. Well, let the swine have their husks! Let the swine, I say, have their provender. You will never make them any better by denying them their husks; you may excite their angry passions against you that is all; let them have their husks. But you, on the other hand, who are a Christian, are a different being; you are lifted into another state, you have another nature. Now, could you enjoy those things? If you really could find satisfaction in them, you are a hypocrite. If your soul really could stretch herself at rest, and find the bed long enough, and the coverlet broad enough to cover you in the chambers of sin, then you are a hypocrite, and one of these days, down

to the pit of hell your soul must go! But if, on the other hand, you feel sure and certain that if you could indulge in sin without a punishment, it would still be a punishment of itself; and if you feel you could have the whole world, and never be parted from it, it would be quite enough misery not to be parted from it; for your God—your God—is what your soul craves after; then be of good courage; you are a child of God! With all your sins and imperfections, take this to your comfort—if your soul has no rest in sin, you are not as the sinner is. If you are still crying after and craving after something better, Christ has not forgotten you, for you have not quite forgotten Him. Here is a test, then.

And then, secondly, we must use our text as an *encouragement*. Here we have an encouragement to backsliders to return like the dove. She did not find the ark shut against her—we do not even find there was any delay. Noah pulled her in at once. To the sinner here is encouragement, too. If you come back to the ark, you shall not be excluded. If any man shall be shut out of heaven, he shuts the door himself. He who is damned signs his own death warrant. Our verse is true—

***“None are excluded hence
But those who do themselves exclude.”***

If you come—sinner, drunkard, blasphemer, liar, thief—whoever you may be, it is written, “He who comes to Me I will in no wise cast out.”

“But here is one,” I think I hear someone say, “here is one of such a sort as never came before; blacker than night, more full of sin than the egg is full of meat; now, now *there* is one who will be shut out.” I say make way for him, make way for him; stand back you common sinners, make a way for him, now we will see whether Christ is true or not! Brethren, what will be the result? Why we know that in Christ there is love and truth and faithfulness, and that what He says He means, and that His promise He will perform. When that black sinner comes, the Lord looks upon him with an eye of unutterable love, and His first word is, “I have blotted out your iniquity as a cloud, and like a thick cloud your transgression.” “I have loved you with an everlasting love,” and His next act is to plunge that sinner in the fountain filled with blood, and suddenly he comes out whiter than snow, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, for He is able to cleanse from all iniquity, and to deliver from all unrighteousness, and to make the foulest and vilest bright as the sun at noonday. This is encouragement—God help you to take it! May the Holy Spirit bring you to Christ today.

And then, lastly, we use our text, I think, as a loud cry *for gratitude*. Does Christ receive us when we have found Him, and is there none on earth like He? Is He the best of all the good, the fairest of all the lovely? Oh then, let us praise Him! Down with your idols, and up with the Lord Jesus. Now let the standard of all pomp and pride be trampled under foot, and let the cross of Jesus, which the world frowns and scoffs at, be lifted up. Oh for a high throne for the Savior! Let Him be lifted up forever, and let my soul sit at His feet, and kiss His feet, and wash them with my tears. Oh how precious is Christ! How can it be that I have thought so little of Him? How is it I can go abroad for anything else when He is so full, so rich, so satisfying? Christian, make a covenant with your heart, and ask the Lord to ratify it—that you will never depart from Him. Bid Him set you as a signet upon His finger and as a bracelet upon His arm. Ask Him to bind you about Him as the bride decks herself with ornaments, and as the bridegroom puts on his jewelry. I would live in Christ's heart—in the clefts of that Rock my soul would abide! The sparrow has made a house, and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young, even Your altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God, and so, too, would I make my nest, my home in You, and never from You may the soul of Your turtle dove go forth again, but may I nestle close to Jesus who has pulled me back into the ark after my backsliding. May the Holy Spirit so preserve us for His name's sake. Amen.

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